

# ENERGY STAR: Rising to the Challenge

How facilities can make energy efficiency a priority

JEAN LUPINACCI

Soaring energy costs and growing environmental concerns are prompting more and more property managers to consider the energy efficiency of their facilities. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), America's buildings contribute 17 percent of national greenhouse gas emissions and expend up to \$80 billion worth of energy each year. These numbers can be reduced through a greater focus on energy management. The EPA challenges businesses and institutions across the country to reduce energy use by 10 percent or more. The ENERGY STAR Challenge calls attention to opportunities for improving energy efficiency and directs organizations to ENERGY STAR guidance, tools and resources to reduce energy use and protect the environment. Through this article, as director of the EPA's ENERGY STAR Commercial

and Industrial Branch, I offer some insight on the EPA program and the growing trend of building and facility managers incorporating energy-efficient solutions as part of their facility management program.

*What is the ENERGY STAR Program?*

ENERGY STAR is a voluntary, market-based partnership designed to offer businesses and consumers energy efficiency solutions for saving energy, money and the environment. While consumer awareness of ENERGY STAR is greatest for products that meet strict energy efficiency specifications, such as appliances and consumer electronics, in 1999 EPA extended the ENERGY STAR program to buildings that perform in the top 25 percent of the market. Last year, EPA challenged building operators to improve energy efficiency cost-effectively

by 10 percent or more with the help of no-cost ENERGY STAR tools and resources, and there has been a great response.

*What are the benefits to participating in the ENERGY STAR program?*

Energy use represents the single largest operating expense in a commercial property. Reducing energy use by 30 percent is equivalent to increasing return on investment and building asset value by 5 percent. Additionally, energy-efficient upgrades and improvements often contribute to safer and healthier work environments, which in turn increase employee satisfaction and productivity. ENERGY STAR leaders prove that responsible energy management not only reduces utility costs and protects the environment, but also improves the bottom line.

In addition to saving money, attaining efficiency goals provides opportunities for recognition. Each year, ENERGY STAR recognizes individual buildings with energy performance ratings in the top 25 percent of the market. Also, organizations that achieve energy performance improvements of 10, 20 and 30 percent are designated as ENERGY STAR Leaders. These achievements help businesses stand out in the minds of employees, customers and the community.

*When it comes to energy efficiency, how can facility managers get started?*

An effort to make a change begins with an assessment of your starting point, a goal of where you would like to be and a plan that will help get you there. Our tools help facility managers determine their facilities' current energy usage and status, establish goals for improvement, and implement changes that help an organization reach those goals.

Assess. EPA's national energy performance rating system allows facility managers to score their buildings' energy efficiency on a scale of 1 to 100, relative to similar buildings across the country. Buildings that score lower ratings are typically good candidates for improvement, as the low rating may reflect operational issues or outdated technology. Buildings that achieve a rate of 75 or greater may qualify for the ENERGY STAR. For more info on this process, visit: [www.energystar.gov/benchmark](http://www.energystar.gov/benchmark).

Set a goal. When it comes to improving energy efficiency, a good target is a goal of 10 percent or more for a particular building or portfolio of buildings. By using ENERGY STAR benchmarking tools, as well as other software that helps plan, track and manage energy costs, facility managers will save time and money. They will also be able to manage energy use across as little or as much of the organization as they want. In fact, a joint collaboration between EPA, energy service providers, and their customers successfully tested and implemented an automated web services application that allows thousands of buildings to receive energy ratings without any manual data entry.

Implement. This final step requires setting a timeline, making necessary improvements and working to continually evaluate your building's performance. Your organization can use the results and information gathered during these evaluation and review processes to create improved action plans, identify best practices, and set new performance goals.

*What are some immediate, low-cost changes that managers can make to get quick results?*

There are many things that facility managers can do to make significant reductions in energy use at their facilities. When purchasing new computers, scanners, printers, copiers, monitors, water coolers and other equipment, make sure that the equipment is



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ENERGY STAR qualified. Recalibrate settings on furnaces, boilers, water heaters and other energy providers so that they reflect temperature standards, such as no cooling below 78 degrees and no heating above 60 degrees. Inspect the building regularly to identify areas or systems that might be a drain on the building's resources—leaky windows, insufficient insulation, outdated heating and air conditioning systems—and replace or upgrade as needed. Encourage staff to participate by asking them to turn off lights when not in use or power down computers at night. Educate building owners, operators, tenants and others on what they can do to be energy efficient and how their actions can benefit the environment as well as each other. These changes become systemic as organizations adopt strategic energy management programs.

*Why does it make sense for facility managers to take the lead on energy efficiency?*

Energy efficiency encompasses everything and everyone from the infrastructure

of a building to the equipment inside the building, from the professionals who maintain the building to the individuals who live and work inside those buildings. The responsibility for making improvements to building energy performance does not rest only upon facility managers, but it does start there. Because these are the buildings we live and work in, and because facility managers often know more about the workings of their particular building than anyone else, they have the opportunity to be an agent for change. **FMJ**

#### About the Author:

Jean Lupinacci is the director of the ENERGY STAR Commercial and Industrial Branch in the Climate Protection Partnerships Division at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. She has been with EPA for more than 20 years and is an expert in voluntary efficiency programs.



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